



Disney's War Against the Wilderness

WHEN WALT DISNEY DIED IN 1966, the consensual eulogy about his greatness was interrupted by occasional whisperings about the fate of his body. It had not been interred or cremated at all, so the rumors went, but had been frozen, the creator of Mickey Mouse having in his later years become a convert to the fledgling cult of cryogenics. At about the time of this gothic gossip, Disney's corporation was receiving permission from the U.S. Forest Service to carve one of the world's largest ski areas out of Mineral King, an untouched part of the Sierra Valley, bordered on three sides by Sequoia National Park, and midway between Los Angeles and San Francisco. It was this that led certain Hollywood cynics to wonder out loud if Walt would one day be thawed out and return to ski when his magic Alpine kingdom was completed.

It is easy to see why anything touched by Walt Disney Productions lends itself to comic speculation. But the question of the development of Mineral King is deadly serious. While the total environmental impact of this relatively small area is hardly as important as other eminent tragedies—say, the trans-Alaska pipeline—it is a symbol of the jeopardy of America's ecology. Not since John Muir's historic fight to save the Yosemite Valley from private development has there been a conservation battle of such water-

shed proportions. For Walt Disney Productions is being aided in its attempted rape of this beautiful area by the U.S. Forest Service itself. At the core of the Mineral King controversy are issues such as the right of the Forest Service to license such development without holding prior public hearings; the right of developers to build ugly resorts within a National Game Refuge; the right of the government to lease large tracts of national forest land to developers; the propriety of the government lobbying through a highway across a national park for the convenience of a private resort; and the right of government agencies to string an unsightly power transmission line across a national park without congressional approval. When the Sierra Club challenges the Mineral King plan in the Supreme Court this fall, these questions and others will be raised; and the answer will tell much about the future of America's environment.

The decision, which is expected early next year, will be made on the basis of arguments presented in the stiff formality of the Court's chambers. But no brief can possibly match a first-hand look at this spectacular two-mile-long Sierra valley. If the justices were to doff their robes, fly to California and drive the winding mountain road into Mineral King, they would find themselves surrounded by steep mountain peaks, waterfalls, and streams, a domain popu-

by Roger Rapoport

lated by wildlife, countless species of wildflowers and an occasional camper or hiker. If they followed the hiking trails up into the glacially formed valleys, they would discover 22 pristine lakes, each with its own distinctive setting and character. They would understand the extent to which Disney's Forest Service-sanctioned plan would change all this, the \$35 million investment bringing in 2.5 million visitors annually via a new 26-mile road built across Sequoia National Park by the state at a cost of \$45 million. All would park in an 8- to 10-story structure designed to accommodate 3600 cars. Up to 12,000 daily visitors would be whisked by a tramway to an Alpine village, check in at a 1030-room hotel complex, meet at the convention center, browse in shops and watch movies (presumably the latest Disney fare) at the theater. In the morning a system of more than two dozen ski lifts would carry the guests up four miles into the surrounding wilderness for skiing in winter or picnicking in summer. There would be a choice of three buffeteria, three snack bars, a konditorei, teen center, coffee shop, waitress-served restaurant, multi-service restaurant and gourmet restaurant. Although the federal government legally can lease only 80 acres for resorts developed on national forest land, this Disney recreation empire would cover 300 acres of land in the Mineral King Wildlife Refuge with ski facilities spanning over 13,000 acres; access to the extra property is obtained through year-to-year lease permits supplementing the basic 80-acre permit and good for 30 years.

OF COURSE THIS DEVELOPMENT is only a beginning. The Disney corporation frequently cites a pledge made by Walt when his company first won the bid: "All of us promise that our efforts now and in the future will be dedicated to making Mineral King grow to meet the ever-increasing public need. I guess you might say it won't ever be finished." And that's precisely what frightens a lot of people who fear for the fragile beauty of Mineral King. They point out that Yosemite Valley is considered crowded even with 10,000 visitors, and that region is seven times the size of the Mineral King Valley. The Disney resort would wipe out all Forest Service campsites in Mineral King. Backpackers would be forced to park and pay at the Disney lot and then compete with the crowds, lifts and noise. The sixty Mineral King cabin owners who have leased sites from the Forest Service for as long as 50 years would be forced out. A reservoir would cover part of the valley with a channel carved out to "stabilize" the Kaweah River and keep it from changing its course. Forty-five irreplaceable giant Sequoias would be endangered by the access road. Lodgepole pine and red fir forest would be hacked down to accommodate ski runs. Nearly 400 acres would be bulldozed, graded, or otherwise altered.

Even though the matter is still in the courts, the Forest Service is already readying the valley for this massive development, which it believes will "improve the ecology of Mineral King." One camping area was closed off in 1970 because of "pollution," thus making way for a reservoir that will cut off access to the region. Eventually the Forest

Service plans to eliminate camping altogether in Mineral King and build a new campsite near Disney's 8- to 10-story parking ramp five miles from the valley. Oblivious to the valley's history as a one-time California boom town, the Forest Service has already torn down buildings from the area's colorful past, replacing them with such structures as a grotesque \$4000 kiosk that carries displays touting the wonders of federal land management programs.

The Forest Service's actions in Mineral King are not some kind of bizarre accident. It manages 187 million acres of federal land in 44 states and Puerto Rico, and is actually after a piece of the resort development business itself. After several decades of leasing public lands to over 200 ski corporations, the Forest Service has elected to try its own hand at the lucrative recreation business. The federal take of the Forest Service at Mineral King is projected at \$600,000 a year. Success here would guarantee similar big resort ventures elsewhere. It's not hard to see the lure. In California alone, recreational subdividers are selling off 700,000 acres a year to urbanites hungry for fresh air and a piece of the vanishing ecology. One company alone, Boise-Cascade, has 19 land projects going that have cut up 84,700 acres into 41,700 lots. In the 1968-69 fiscal year Boise sold land contracts worth \$159 million.

Since the Forest Service owns more recreational land (20 million acres) in California than anyone else, it's only natural for the agency to go after a slice of the market. And Mineral King is a natural starting point. The issues and the stakes are quite clear. This is why the battle being waged by the Sierra Club and a loose coalition of environmentalists over this small piece of wilderness has taken on such epic proportions.

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THIS IS NOT THE FIRST TIME Mineral King has been the target of outsiders. Greedy speculators, sharp promoters, and their political allies gave the valley its first economic jolt a century ago. In 1872 a spiritualist named James Crabtree claimed he was guided by an Indian spirit to the White Chief mine at the south end of Mineral King, which he duly staked and recorded in 1873. Crabtree and a group of businessmen and ranchers from the nearby San Joaquin Valley town of Porterville immediately formed a Mineral King Mining District. Newspaper reports of a fabulous lode of gold, silver and other metals lured prospectors onto the rugged back country trails in a rush to the remote valley. By the fall of 1873 sixty-five claims had been filed. A spate of mining companies formed overnight and the speculators rushed in.

The trails into Mineral King were upgraded into a narrow road; mining equipment and other freight was packed in by mules. A sawmill sprang up to provide lumber for the new homes, stores, hotels and saloons of Mineral King, whose population eventually reached 3000. But the beckoning Indian spirit apparently didn't know much about mineralogy. The Mineral King ore gained the name "rebellious" because it simply didn't contain enough gold, silver, zinc, lead or sulphur to support extraction. In September of 1877 the New England Tunneling and Smelting Co. declared bankruptcy. Then on February 18, 1878, the first

of a series of disastrous slides crushed a bunkhouse, and damaged mining equipment at the big Empire Mine.

The town dwindled until Tom Fowler, a state senator and cattle baron from Visalia, bought the Empire Mine and recharged the boom. To spur his miners on, he would leave the mine with a load of raw ore and return with a handsome silver bar that spelled a fortune for everyone. Unfortunately the same bar was used over and over again. It was bogus, and had been made from melted down silverware.

With boundless optimism Fowler spent \$50,000 to upgrade the road into Mineral King and install a stamp mill. But nature rebelled. A disastrous avalanche in April 1880 ripped it out and ruined some of the buildings. As the women and children were evacuated, the miners gradually realized the ore was too expensive to extract. By 1882 Mineral King was virtually deserted, the ghost town serially destroyed by avalanches over the years.

By the turn of the century San Joaquin Valley families began vacationing at Mineral King during summers. The 15,000-acre region became an undesignated region of the Sequoia National Forest. In 1926 a federal act incorporated most of the national forest land around Mineral King into the Sequoia National Park. Mineral King itself was excluded because a few mining interests were still active, leftovers from the great silver rush. Instead the region was designated a Sequoia National Game Refuge.

In the 1920s families began building modest summer cabins on land leased from the Forest Service. Many were built by schoolteachers in a locale dubbed Faculty Flat. Each summer a small group of cognoscenti would come to Mineral King to fish, hike, backpack, ride, climb or explore old mining ruins. No phone, electric or gas lines ever came in. Cooking was done on wood stoves. For water, families stuck a rubber tube in the crystal clear Kaweah River. At the summer's end they would simply roll up the tube and take it home.

The good word spread and soon hardy vacationers from all over the valley and Southern California knew about Mineral King. Three pack stations and a tiny summer resort with nine cabins catered to tourists. Crowds were no problem because the winding road into the area (322 turns over the last 22 miles) acted as a natural control.

But the Forest Service decided that this calm use of the area was not profitable enough. So it conceived of "winterizing" Mineral King and in 1949 issued a prospectus seeking private investors to develop a ski area. But lack of an all-weather highway scared off all would-be bidders. While the Forest Service tried to solve the highway problem, a new visitor began frequenting Mineral King during the 1950s. His name was Walt Disney and he would drastically alter the history of the valley.

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RAY BUCKMAN, WHO OPERATED the rental cabins, store and a pack station, invited Disney up for a visit. Walt was mesmerized by Mineral King and returned often as Buckman's guest. As a skier who had invested in the Sugar Bowl winter resort (and had a mountain named after him) 200 miles to the north, he

appreciated Mineral King's potential, but at this point he was still preoccupied with Disneyland. Then in 1960 Disney worked with famed ski coach Willey Schaeffler on the pageantry for the Squaw Valley winter Olympics, afterwards asking Schaeffler to find him a ski area. The coach suggested Mineral King, and the pair visited the area, but Walt deferred a decision because he was tied down working on plans for the New York World's Fair and his projected Florida resort, Walt Disney World.

When work eased up a bit, Walt's advisors suggested he think about building a ski resort near the Los Angeles area. The Forest Service had been talking about licensing a ski area at Mt. San Geronimo, 100 miles east of Los Angeles. But Disney discovered the Sierra Club was opposed to development in this wilderness area. He would have no part



of such a scheme. After all, said Walt, how would it look for an honorary life member of the Sierra Club to go against the organization?

Walt took great pride in the 1955 citation that honored his wildlife films and movies. Sierra Club president Dr. Ernest S. Griffith wrote: "Disney is like a sun ripening the grain for the wilderness advocates to harvest. . . . We need Disney, an army of Disneys, to tell the world what we have found, what we are fighting for, the glory of creation with the bloom on it, the splendor that men can continue to explore and enjoy as long as they respect all that is alive, protect beauty and cherish the equal rights of future generations in this precious planet."

But in 1963 all these honorific considerations fell prey to the hard-headed business sense for which Disney was justly famed. He finally elected to move on Mineral King. Un-

like the 19th century miners, Disney proceeded with caution, determined to subdue Mineral King's stubborn beauty once and for all. The problem was that he knew nothing about the highly sophisticated business of running a ski resort. For the skiing business brings with it delicate management problems on such sophisticated matters as avalanches, snowfall, trail maintenance, lift operation, highway access and the weather. The season is relatively short and even the best ski areas are frequently struggling to stay out of the red.

BUT NONE OF THIS DETERRED UNCLE WALT. He had, after all, made a fortune hiring experts and putting his name on their work. Richard Schickel's biography, *The Disney Version*, relates one of Walt's favorite stories about his role in the corporate whirl



at Walt Disney Productions: "You know I was stumped one day when a little boy asked, 'Do you draw Mickey Mouse?' I had to admit that I did not draw any more. 'Then do you think up all the jokes and ideas?' 'No,' I said, 'I don't do that.' Finally he looked at me and said, 'Mr. Disney, just what do you do?' 'Well,' I said, 'sometimes I think of myself as a little bee. I go from one area of the studio to another and gather pollen and sort of stimulate everybody. I guess that's the job I do.'"

It was all Uncle Walt's way of explaining why he couldn't sketch Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, Pinocchio, Snow White, the dwarfs or any of his other characters. At the peak of his power, Disney tried to have his animators teach him how to sketch the old mouse for autograph hounds who wanted it with his name. But he couldn't master it. Even

worse, he couldn't duplicate the famous script signature that was emblazoned on all his productions as the corporate trademark.

But if he couldn't draw a mouse or sign his name, Disney had a genius for hiring people with know-how. And that was how he came to hire Bob Hicks, a slick Southern California businessman who specialized in fronting for prominent politicians and executives who wanted to buy land anonymously. Hicks counted such California power-brokers as Jesse Unruh among his clients; he made a perfect dummy buyer because he looked and acted like a type-cast executive. Well-groomed, soft-spoken, and even-tempered, Hicks took on a tough assignment from Uncle Walt. The job was to buy up all 740 acres of private land in the Mineral King area so Disney would be free from competition. Once the land was tied up, Walt figured he would persuade the Forest Service to lease access to the rest of the valley acreage.

This strategy was based on a lesson Walt had learned at Disneyland. Walt underestimated the drawing power of his Anaheim park and bought only 230 acres. A huge number of ugly motels, drive-ins, restaurants and other businesses flocked to the Disneyland perimeter and were eventually grossing five times what the park was making. That, as well as his native bent, made Walt into something of a globalist. His thinking is best reflected in the new Walt Disney World resort that opened this fall in central Florida. The 43 square mile project, covering an area twice the size of Manhattan, is a Disney fiefdom. A special bill was put through the Florida legislature that gave Disney World the effective powers of a county. The Disney organization controls an improvement district and two municipalities. The state also sold a \$33 million bond issue to pay for a highway linking the resort with key freeways. And the first phase of the project is being built under a "no-strike" agreement negotiated with all 17 unions involved.

Imbued with this mentality Hicks began quietly negotiating in 1963 for the private property at Mineral King. By early 1965 he had bought up 28.7 acres from 18 different parties. The land was in two parcels that essentially controlled access to the valley. One site was a 23.7-acre wash area at the foot of Empire Mountain which included remains of the old Empire Mine, stamp mill and the present-day Mineral King dump. The other was Ray Buckman's little five-acre resort complex where Walt had unwound during summer vacations. Hicks then moved five miles west to buy up the 160-acre Wells-Seaborn property at Silver City. Tying up this key parcel would have given Disney effective control of the prime private terrain at Mineral King. But the Forest Service, which had been continually re-studying the ski area concept, decided to move before Hicks took control of this key access point for Disney. In March 1965 the agency issued a new prospectus inviting proposals for a \$3 million development at Mineral King.

Part of the push to open bidding at this point came from a rival of Disney's, a Los Angeles stockbroker named Robert Brandt who had contributed heavily to Lyndon Johnson's 1964 presidential campaign. His wife, actress Janet Leigh, had campaigned for both Johnson and California Governor Pat Brown and was rewarded with appointments

to Lady Bird Johnson's beautification council and the California recreation commission.

At the behest of Governor Brown, the California State Senate put an amendment on the omnibus highway bill of 1965 which opened the way to a \$25 million grant for upgrading the Mineral King road into an all-weather road. The Forest Service announcement and sudden passage of the road bill killed Disney's dream of tying up the private property. The price on the Wells-Seaborn property tripled, so Hicks dropped his real estate venture and went to work putting together a bid proposal for Disney. Six bids were submitted, with Disney and Brandt the prime contenders. Although some Forest Service people preferred Brandt's bid because of its careful avalanche-planning, Disney finally won out with his \$35 million package. A key factor was his good name and his connections as a naturalist and Sierra Club member, which federal officials believed would help them beat the expected objections of environmentalists.

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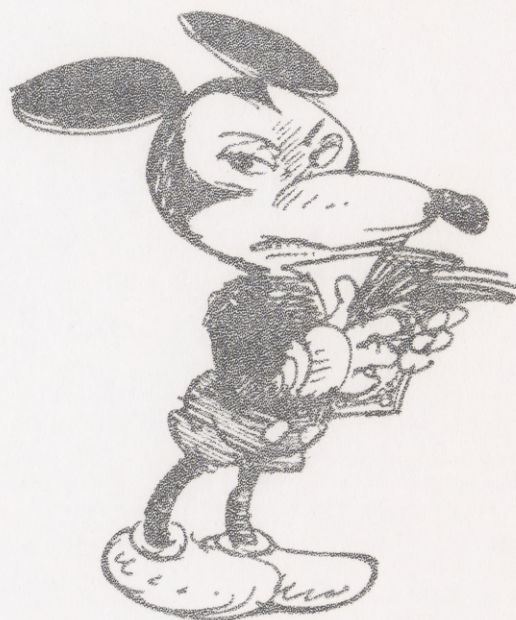
IN JANUARY 1966, WALT DISNEY was given a three-year preliminary permit to begin making snow surveys and to complete his development plans. This was vitally necessary since the bid proposals were drawn so hastily that they showed ski trails running uphill on Miner's Nose. The main village was sited on the Disney-owned 23.7 acres at the foot of Empire Mountain, which was a prime avalanche area. Walt continued babying along his pet project until his sudden death on December 15, 1966. Then his organization continued pushing the plan as a sort of memorial. Dave Beck, veteran mountaineer who had worked as a ski patrolman at several major California resorts, was hired by the Disney corporation to head a Mineral King snow survey project. Moving with his wife Sue into the old restaurant that had once served Ray Buckman's resort and setting up housekeeping during the winter of 1966-67, Beck spent his days climbing the mountains charting snow depth, avalanche hazards and terrain factors. With him periodically were several assistants, all experienced mountaineers.

While Beck's snow survey was going forward, however, the vital road plan was stalled. California's highway engineer J. C. Womack said the Mineral King road could be built only "at the expense of other critical (road-building) projects." He added that the use of funds set aside for other road-building projects would be "... very disruptive to previously approved planning and scheduling of projects in the Southern Counties" of California. But the Disney name was still magic. To get the road work going, the federal Economic Development Administration gave the California Highway Commission a \$3 million grant based on the ruse that development of Mineral King was vital to the state's economy.

When Secretary of Interior Stuart Udall balked at the Forest Service plan to put the road across Sequoia National Park (noting that construction of the all-weather road would involve removal of 8 million cubic yards of soil which would scar and erode steep hillsides, with the subsequent runoff possibly undermining the root structure of giant Sequoia trees in the park), it was time for the Republicans to do

their bit for Disney. The Brown administration had started the road project, but it took the Reagan administration to finish it. In exchange for trading the federal government the valuable northern Redwood acreage necessary to establish a Redwood National Park, Governor Reagan (who had received substantial financial backing from Disney in the '66 campaign) demanded that the Johnson administration override Udall. Johnson, acting through the Bureau of the Budget, agreed, and in December 1967 Udall issued a permit that allowed the road to cross Sequoia National Park.

But jubilation over the highway victory was muted by technical difficulties at Mineral King, where nature kept striking back. In its promotional literature the Disney Corporation pledged that: "Public safety considerations have been uppermost in the minds of engineers and planners in-



involved in design and review of facility plans. Avalanche studies have been made by Forest Service specialists and by Walt Disney Productions consultants." What the press releases didn't specify, however, was the fact that these studies proved conclusively that the original village location at the foot of Empire Mountain was a call to disaster. This Disney-owned area was subject to frequent avalanches. One Disney avalanche consultant convinced the corporation to install a snow deflection barrier up on Empire Mountain. But the avalanches flew right over it. So after much soul-searching the corporation finally heeded the advice of the Forest Service and Beck, and relocated the village at a safe site down toward Monarch Creek. This was a disappointment to the accountants who knew that putting the village on Forest Service land would cost more in the form of concession fees.

HICKS, WHO WAS NOW ON THE DISNEY payroll full-time, and other Disney executives made frequent winter visits by helicopter. They often brought along politicians, businessmen, and ski association leaders for a look. Dave and Sue Beck played host to the sightseers, feeding, guiding and entertaining them.

By the winter of 1968-69, Beck's snow survey was moving along well. Wally Ballenger, a former ski patrol leader at Squaw Valley, and two ski mountaineers, Randy Kletka (26) and Gary Kirk (25), stayed at Mineral King with Beck and worked periodically as Disney-paid assistants. In December of 1968, the resident Disney team began aiding the Forest Service's Mineral King specialist Pete Wyckoff on avalanche studies. Wyckoff hauled his 75 millimeter recoilless rifle to a platform on the banks of the Kaweah River, loaded it with two-pound shells and began shooting down avalanches on Empire Mountain. The shots arched 3000 feet into the air, traveling a distance of 1.5 miles, and some landed right at the boundary of the neighboring Sequoia National Park. The target practice, which was resumed on three subsequent days in December 1968 and January 1969, spawned rumors that the Forest Service had declared war on the national park. Wyckoff climbed up on the mountain and made doubly certain none of his shots travelled over the boundary.

Heavy snowfall blanketed the valley during these winter months, raising some concern in Beck's mind about avalanche dangers to himself, his wife and the three assistants. Although there hadn't been a serious avalanche at the site of their cabins in 80 years, the snowpack was mounting steadily. Beck had raised the idea of providing the snow survey team with a sturdy house at a safer location. But Hicks felt it wasn't necessary and pacified the Becks by putting indoor plumbing into their flimsy winter home.

The big snow was perfect for Hick's promotional tours and as late as the beginning of February he was showing up to have dinner with the Becks, Ballenger, Kirk and Kletka. In the second week of February, a Disney camera team came up to shoot footage for a documentary on Mineral King. Part of the work involved photographing avalanche protection work, and Randy Kletka was hired by Disney to work with the cameramen. A big snowstorm cut the shooting short, and the film people were snowbound for several days until they were finally flown out by helicopter.

On Sunday, February 23, Dave and Sue Beck went down to the San Joaquin valley town of Visalia to see the dentist, shop and go to the movies. That night a snowstorm triggered a series of tremendous avalanches. On Empire Mountain a slide hurtled over Disney's snow deflection barrier and buried the original Mineral King village site in 30 feet of snow. Directly across from Empire Mountain a slide on Miner's Ridge knocked down scores of trees and buried the valley floor in 14 feet of snow. Among the casualties in this slide was Pete Wyckoff's 75 mm recoilless rifle, which was swept off its platform into the Kaweah River. Not until the following October, when the river finally went down, was Wyckoff able to spot his rusty gun and salvage it from the riverbed.

IT WAS THE THIRD AVALANCHE THAT brought fatality. A slide off the Potato Patch Ridge spilled across the canyon and buried Ray Buckman's old resort under 14 feet of snow. Wally Ballenger, who had been staying in a cabin used by Bob Hicks during the summer, managed to kick his way out of the attic and tunnel out. But Randy Kletka did not. He had been staying at Beck's quarters, where the snow toppled the wood-burning stove, setting the house on fire, and Kletka smothered.

Unable to make phone contact with Ballenger or Kletka on Monday, Beck rented a plane and flew over Mineral King. The cabins were completely buried so, after he landed at Three Rivers, Beck notified Hicks and the Tulare County sheriff. A search party was organized and went in by helicopter. Hicks kept in touch with Dave Beck by phone and bawled him out when he learned his employee had notified the sheriff. "Don't say anything to anyone," admonished Hicks. "We'll handle everything from Burbank." The Disney executive also spoke by phone with Sue Beck: "A check for Randy is in the mail, will you hold it for me?" She agreed to do it, failing to see what was on Hicks' mind.

But when Hicks reached the Three Rivers airport his game plan became obvious. After a helicopter inspection of Mineral King, he returned to the airport to await word from the search party. When word came through that Kletka was dead, Hicks' visceral reaction was to call Disney's corporate attorneys in Burbank. After he hung up, the Mineral King project manager told Sue Beck: "I just talked to our legal department and we can't acknowledge that we knew who Randy was." Later he added: "People are going to ask you who Randy was and we will have to say we don't know him."

Hicks made no attempt to notify Kletka's family about the death. Instead he kept busy telling local reporters that he didn't know who Randy was. The ploy worked beautifully. News stories did not identify Kletka as a mountaineer who had been working for Disney. Instead he came off as an itinerant hippie who just happened to be caught in an avalanche at Mineral King.

After the fatal avalanche, Beck was *persona non grata* in the Disney organization. The mountaineer who had climbed the Mineral King peaks for three winters was treated as if he were responsible for the slide. The corporate attitude seemed to be that Beck had personally stood on top of the valley and pushed down the avalanche.

Disgusted by the experience, Beck quit. The Disney Corporation refused to reimburse him for personal possessions destroyed in the avalanche. When the snow melted that spring, Hicks elected to have the damaged buildings burned down.

Beck had to race in just ahead of the torches to save possessions left behind. The burning was carelessly done, scorching a number of trees around the cabins. When the embers died down, the rubble was hauled over to the Mineral King dump located on Disney property.

Even this rubble had a use for Bob Hicks. It made the dump even bigger and uglier, an eyesore that the Disney people promised to eliminate with their development. In tours and slide shows to civic groups, Hicks dwelled at length on this ugly spot, which he claimed was the fault of

litterbugging campers. But he failed to mention that the dump was on Disney property or that it included Disney garbage.

The Disney men also boasted that the disastrous February 1969 avalanches had borne out the careful predictions of their snow survey team. During the summer of 1969, when Pete Wyckoff's 75 mm recoilless rifle still lay at the bottom of the Kaweah River, one company spokesman told the *New York Times*: "We know how to move snow. We can make it move when we want, not when it wants."

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THE DISNEY VERSION DID NOT DECEIVE the Sierra Club, which obtained a temporary injunction against the development on July 26, 1969. Although the injunction was overturned at the appellate level, development is being held up until the entire matter was reviewed by the Supreme Court.

Sierra Club director Michael McCloskey says his organization would like to see Mineral King added to beautiful Sequoia National Park, where it should have gone in the first place. Joe Fontaine, who heads the Sierra Club chapter in the Mineral King area, believes blocking the resort is essential to salvation of the southern Sierra region. In Tehachapi, where Fontaine makes his home, American, Canadian and Philippine firms are already carving up 150 square miles into recreational subdivisions. If Mineral King goes through, virtually all suitable land in the region will be prone to similar exploitation.

On Faculty Flat the summer cabin owners are nervous too. For almost half a century families have lived better here unelectrically. In a time of smothering rhetoric about ecology, virtually all of these families have been making it without electricity, gas or hot water. But, instead of winning praise for their personal conservation efforts, they face condemnation by the Forest Service to make way for Disney, his roads and utilities. Hicks plans to use the cabins as temporary housing for his construction crews. And eventually Faculty Flat will get its own Walt Disney memorial conservation education center which will: "make every visitor aware of the importance of conservation . . . [and] the techniques utilized at Mineral King to prevent soil erosion and pollution of air, water and sound."

Jim Parks, a school principal who has summered at Mineral King for 39 years, thinks the conservation center plan is insane: "People have been getting conservation education here by themselves for decades. They don't need Disney to tell them the difference between a pine and a fir. This is the only place in California that's the same way it was when I was a kid. When they take it away, I don't know where we'll go."

Mrs. Dorothy Barboni, a Visalia widow who has spent the last 47 summers in Mineral King, feels the same way. Her porch overlooks a key trailhead and much of her day is spent giving food and drink away to the hikers who come back every summer: "We've already got smog coming up from the San Joaquin Valley. If Disney comes, Mineral King will just be a city. Just another city."

The backpackers are facetious about the resort plan. At the end of a day's climb, they joke about the summer tourists that will come to Disney's resort, ride the lifts up the mountains with their backpacks and then walk down. In Disney's world that will be considered roughing it.

And while the Forest Service tries to push through the Disney project, camping opportunities are dwindling. Not a single dime was appropriated for new Forest Service campgrounds in California during fiscal 1971-72. Jim James, the Sequoia National Forest Supervisor, says two prime Ranger districts at the southern end of the Sierra may soon be completely closed to camping on undeveloped sites: "I think the day when camping on undeveloped sites in California national forests is terminated may not be too far in coming. We're already thinking about a reservation system for the campsites."

So while the federal government and the Sierra Club fight Mineral King out in Washington, Bob Hicks and the Disney team wait quietly in the wings. In Burbank, where Bob Hicks is spending the waiting period designing an airport for the Florida project, all seems calm and confident. The company has charged all its \$1 million Mineral King development costs off its taxes. In the five years since Walt's death, his corporate heirs have pushed annual profits up from \$12.3 million to a record \$21.8 million. That's the best of any studio in Hollywood, where most of the competition is in the red and some are out auctioning off old props to stay alive. Disney's movies, roadshows, Mickey Mouse apparel, and amusement park are all hitting new peaks. And the company estimates the new Florida project will net \$20 million annually within a few years, equal to the entire corporate profit of 1970.

Things have never been better. It's easy to see why the corporate philosophy hasn't changed, why the streets of Disney's Burbank lot retain names like Snow White Boulevard and Dopey Drive. The films stay safely in the banalities of humanoid Volkswagens that get involved with Edsels, hippie mailmen and the Mafia. Disneyland's young park staff continues to wear the shortest hair in Southern California outside the Hare Krishna movement. And "One Nation Under God, an inspiring story of America's freedom" at the Florida project, features nothing less than robotized replicas of all 36 presidents of the United States.

Shortly before Walt opened Disneyland, a group of social workers were taken on a tour and one asked their guide: "Will there be discounts for underprivileged children?" The guide replied: "Not in Mr. Disney's lifetime." Nor in the lifetime of his corporation. For all its sanctimoniousness and sentimentality, Walt Disney Productions is every bit as greedy and self-centered as U.S. Steel or Dow Chemical. The beautiful old nature films of the '50s are the illusion; the reality is the determination to use all the corporation's considerable good will and political clout to stage a take-over via the U.S. Forest Service at Mineral King. It is the end to all our childhood fantasies: Mickey Mouse and Smokey the Bear conspiring to tear up the wilderness.

Roger Rapoport is a California-based writer and author of a new study of the American nuclear weapons program titled, The Great American Bomb Machine (E. P. Dutton).